



REVISION OF CONSTITUTIONS

WAY OF REVITALIZATION

5

THE EVANGELICAL
COUNCIL OF POVERTY



Rome, 2019-2021

Constitutions and Poverty

"Moved by the Holy Spirit, imitate Jesus Christ who being rich, became poor for our sake in order to enrich us with his poverty".

(Const. 20)

We are now moving ahead along our **spiritual pathway** with a reflection on consecrated poverty. Our Constitutions devote numbers 20 to 26 to this subject. After setting out the basis in the object of the vow, the following paragraphs deal with the personal and community dimensions of poverty, and speak about work as one of the demands of poverty, and the communication of goods as a way of expressing it. They conclude by presenting Mary as the poor woman with boundless confidence and trust in our Lord.

We know that there are various dimensions of our hospitaller evangelical poverty which we experience both as a community and in our work on the apostolic mission, which the Constitutions address separately in the relevant chapters. They can help us to experience poverty with all its charismatic force.

In this paper we shall be examining poverty in terms of the life of Jesus of Nazareth and His predilection for the poor, on the basis of the charismatic experience of our Founders, and in the light of the recent documents of the Church.

Suggested methodology for the First Week:

1. *Present the fact sheet as a whole.*
2. *Propose the work for the first week, the enlightenment.*
2. *Dedicate time daily to personal reflection.*
3. *Set a date for the community meeting to share the reflection.*
4. *Summarise, in the meeting the two or three aspects that can help us in the renewal*

I Week: Enlightenment

➤ In the light of the Word

Our Lord has consecrated us to live with Him and to be in total readiness, like Him, to perform His mission. We have surrendered ourselves to God, who while rich, made Himself poor, lowering himself to be like his weak and limited creatures, and making them partakers of His divine riches.

The basis of our consecrated poverty stems from the choice of the Son of God to set aside his divine attributes to take on the condition of a servant out of love for his fellow brothers and sisters (Phil 2,6-8). Consequently, the vow of poverty entails emptying ourselves in order to reach out to people who need to be cared for in their sickness, freed of their existential limitations and restored to the fullness of life. Only by discovering Christ as our sole source of wealth and as the treasure of our lives, shall we

be able to experience total trust and confidence in God, and be totally free of material goods and in total readiness to serve.

The first manifestation of poverty in Jesus's life was His birth. Mary *«gave birth to a son, her first-born, She wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger because there was no room for them at the inn»* (Lk 2,7). This was a material poverty, but there is no doubt that Jesus still suffers today to see the little ones, the weak, the stranger being rejected as He was. From the first moment of His earthly life, Jesus shared solidarity with the poor, by becoming one of them Himself.

By being ourself of the same mind as Jesus Christ (*Phil 2,5*) He will make us witnesses and continuers of His mission which is to *«bring the good news to the poor»*. (Lk 4,18). The hospitaller mission is the special place in which we live the evangelical poverty. We need to touch "the flesh of the poor", which is not possible unless we first touch "the flesh of Christ".

In the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5,1-12), which is Jesus's identity card and life project, the Master calls 'blessed' those who choose to be poor', for they have God Himself as their inheritance. They are blessed because they have placed boundless trust in the Father of mercy. They are blessed because from now on they are our Lord's favoured.

Luke's Gospel invites us to freely enjoy all earthly goods (Lk 12,22-24). We read: *«Not to worry about your life and what you are to eat, nor about your body and how you are to clothe it. For life means more than food, and the body more than clothing»* (cf Lk 12,22-24).

Jesus condemns being heavily laden, because that leads us to place value on secondary things as if they were the most important, but most of all because they lead us to think that God is no longer caring for us with a Father's love. Yet Jesus and invites us to *«Set your hearts on his kingdom, and these other things will be given you as well»* (v. 31).

Freeing ourselves from anxiety for material goods is a sign of faith. The first Christian community put into practice these words: *«Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also»* (Lk 12,34). If it is placed in the Lord we will abandon all material wealth to work tirelessly for the Gospel.

General goods are certainly means which we must seek and creatively use in order to promote and defend people, but we must do so with an attitude of trusting receptiveness to the Kingdom of God, which is manifested by sharing these resources with those in need. Our attitude towards material goods must not be indifference to them, but it must be a sign of what is really important to us, in our consecrated life.

➤ In the light of our Spiritual Heritage

We now address the issue of evangelical poverty from a charismatic perspective. We read in the first Constitutions¹:

«Love all and practise holy poverty, for this is one of the most conspicuous virtues we see in Jesus Christ, who was born poor, and lived and died in poverty. Those

¹ B. Menni, *Constitutions 1882*, n. 65.

who really wish to follow him must therefore give up everything, following the example of the Holy Apostles, the first teachers of Christianity and the main models of Religious life, and of so many other Saints of every age in the Church. As Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, the sisters must therefore take heart, and even rejoice with great and holy joy whenever they feel the effects of holy poverty; and they must place their boundless trust in Our Lord who will never cease to shield them, because in the humble persons of the poor sick women whom they serve and care for, they are caring for and serving the same Lord, the One who cares for the birds of the air and the most modest flowers of the fields».

The current Constitutions say that: «we follow *Christ virgin, poor, obedient, and merciful who passed through this earth as a divine Samaritan for all humanity doing good to all and healing the sick*»². We see that the Hospitaller charism colours the experience of evangelical poverty imbued with the mercy of God and His hospitality.

Our Lord invites us to experience the poverty he lived throughout His life, from His birth to His death. Jesus was ontologically poor and « *took the form of slave to become one among many* (cf. *Phil 2,6-11*). This requires us to cease relying on ourselves and letting ourselves be led by Him. Father Menni's frequent words, "*my Jesus, I mistrust myself, in you I trust and to you I abandon myself*", is not only an ejaculatory prayer; it is more properly a spiritual process of renunciation and abandonment, letting God lovingly take the initiative.

Jesus lived an attitude of poverty and trust in his Father, in total readiness to commit His life and mission into His Father's hands; He experienced poverty in his relationships with His Brothers and with the poor; He experienced poverty in His messianic way of being tempted by riches, power, ostentation and pride; He experienced poverty when He offered Himself entirely out of love, letting Himself be taken as far as to the Cross like a malefactor; He experienced the poverty of feeling abandoned, suffering from the silence of the Father, even though He was always, and in every instant, His Father.

Let us return to article 65 of the 1882 Constitutions:

«Unhappy are those who grumble about the beautiful manna of holy poverty, or are too easily distressed by looking after the poor sick women, distrusting the immense riches of Divine Province, whereas the poor in spirit are a thousand times happier and more blessed, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven: indeed, thanks to the holy virtue of poverty they will earn and find interior peace, joy in this world and the glory of Heaven in the next: and as for their beloved poor sick women, the Daughters of our Lady of the Sacred Heart, by the personal sacrifice of their poverty, will discover seeds of love and will easily find the resources they require to meet the needs of those women».

Fr Menni referred to the passive aspect of poverty, namely, its effects on our lives. The deepest experience of poverty is not only the poverty we choose to practise in the discipleship of Jesus, but the poverty which we accept for ourselves without choosing it, which stems from our human frailty and sinfulness, the existential limitations of time, circumstances, personal, social and religious contingencies, and so on.

² HSC, *Constitutions*, Rome, 1994, n. 11.

Hospitaller evangelical poverty is bound up with Providence and care, and practising hospitality for the benefit of the poor and needy. We care for the Lord through his poor creatures and this, according to Father Menni, gives us great trust in the Lord who “*will never leave us unprotected*”. The Founder looks to the Gospel, and in particular to the Beatitudes (Mt 5,3; 6,25-28), uniting our poverty to the service of the poor and trust in God’s providence.

Hospitaller work has therefore always been one of the demands of the vow of poverty ever since its foundation, as we know from the words of María Angustias:

«The desire which Our Lady’s daughters have to offer lovingly all the relief they can to the poor sick patients, must be so extreme that their superiors are obliged to moderate them, just as Jesus did with his caring Martha»³.

Hospitaller charity endures all things, said María Angustias:

«Everything was made easy for us with the help of grace, especially the work, for we were never satisfied in our desire to work hard. Our Lady helped our little strength to be constant with fortitude. Although we were few, and there was much work, everyone made such efforts that the few did what would have been a great deal for many»⁴.

Other aspects of our consecrated poverty are also underlined in this letter which Father Menni wrote from Mexico⁵:

«In the first place there are many people here and everyone seems to want to serve and love Jesus. [...] There is a poor woman travelling third class surrounded by five or six little ones. When the sea is not very rough, they are contented and happy because they seem unaware of the poverty in which they are travelling, and we suppose that their poor father is awaiting them somewhere in Mexico where he has gone to earn the food for his afflicted family. [...] We who have made a vow of poverty enjoy so many comforts (I said), and these poor people with so many privations are content. ¡Ah, what a lesson for us religious who complain so easily as soon as some little thing is missing!».

Our Founder felt challenged by the poverty he professed. He appreciated the good and the positive side of those who travelled there; but also the effect challenged by the very real poverty of a woman with five children on the boat: her precarious life, self-sacrifice, being applied to go out and face the vagaries of nature, a lack of security and yet her joy despite her poverty.

In order to feel challenged in this way, we have to be in contact with reality, concentrate on those who are suffering, feel empathy and compassion, and be ready to allow ourselves to be challenged, discovering the difference between theory and practice in real life. Sometimes religious poverty has been reduced down to the mere name of evangelical poverty meaning nothing more than asking permission. Looking at reality allowing ourselves to be affected by and challenged by the suffering of the most needy was one of the features of vital importance to the founding of our

³ RMA p. 141.

⁴ RMA p. 209.

⁵ Benito Menni, *Letter* 432,10-12.

Congregation⁶. Today we are travelling on the journey of life with many people: what are we discovering? What are we looking at? What is challenging our poverty?

This approach to things leads to a number of considerations: are we living hospitaller poverty in all the dimensions? Is our personal and community way of life so austere that it incorporates daily work, fatigue, difficulties, sacrifices, privations, sleeplessness and setbacks? Are we content with only what is necessary, or are we allowing ourselves to be attracted by an easy life, consumerism etc....

Father Menni's letter continues thus:

«This, we said, must be one of the most important points in which persons are called by God to religious life will be judged. So often we want to have more than we would have been able to have in the world. There we would have been happy with moderate means, with many privations at the cost of many troubles, difficulties, anxieties and setbacks; and here in religious life we often can no bear to be missing anything. We have made the holy vow of poverty, but we do not want us to lack anything. At times it could be said that we do not come from a poor, humble house or family but that we are descendants of princes and grandest. Instead of coming to religious life to follow Christ, humble, poor and despised, it could be said that we have come in order to appear great».

[...] I thought you would like me to tell you quite simply. I am sure that through Divine Mercy you will obtain with your good will much benefit of the good of your souls and progress in religious virtues and in holy abnegation, especially in the practice of holy poverty and conformity with all that is given for your use. You will also be very grateful, constantly thanking Our Lord for everything He grants you, even if it is the poorest and most despised thing in the house, for this would be a great, unmerited favour granted us by the Divine Providence».

In this reflection, Father Menni repeats several times that the poor person is grateful for what is given, appreciates it and thanks God and the Congregation, and accepts privations. The fundamental key to this is that only if we discover the merciful Christ as our treasure, and are willing to follow him, poor and humiliated as He is, that we could live our poverty in all its dimensions, freely and lovingly. Only those who discover the pearl of great price can sell the other pearls of lesser value (cf. Mt 13,45-46).

We also have a model of hospitaller poverty in our Foundress, whom we know through the testimonies of the sisters of the first community:⁷ *«She cherished holy poverty, and she was the true model of itself. She was very skilled and took delight in working with her hands, particularly needlework and dressmaking, which had previously been her trade in the world, and she was so careful about looking after clothing, that we were driven to emulate her example. She enjoyed doing everything with great care, but always as cheaply as possible».*

She was sustained by her filial trust in God: *«Everyone is well aware of the extreme poverty in which this humble Congregation came into existence, and knows that our virtuous Mother, from the moment she left home, practised poverty to a heroic degree. She was totally devoted to this virtue, and even though very often we lacked the bare*

⁶ Cfr. *Constitutions 1882*, prologue.

⁷ Manuel Martín, *Madre María Josefa del Smo. Sacramento*, Madrid, 1925, pp. 189, 190, 193.

necessities of life, she never lost her trust in Divine Providence, an uplifted her spirit by considering the poverty of the Child Jesus in the Stable in Bethlehem».

The fruit of this poverty was joy: *«If there was one principle in particular in which we excelled it was poverty, because we were short of just about everything, and the sight of our Mother looking so happy when beset by so many hardships, even when deprived of the most basic necessities, communicated that same joy to us.*

In her *Account of the origin*, María Angustias enriches this charismatic experience of poverty when she spoke about the earliest days in Ciempozuelos, marked by extreme material poverty which helped them to focus on essentials, purifying the reasons for following Jesus.

«Yes, my understanding would be too dark if you did not give me light to see the great love you have shown us in allowing us to experience a Little of the great deprivation and extreme poverty you suffered for love of us when you become a child in the poor, humble stable at Bethlehem. ¡Jesus, my Master, I am unable to explain how sweet and consoling it is for a heart which desires to love you, to be offered the chance of being deprived of everything in this world, even the most necessary Why so much goodness for us who deserves nothing? [...] We had not yet taken the first step to follow you, and already you were showing us the loveliness and beauty of the virtue of poverty. [...] Your idea was that from our very first steps towards consecrating ourselves to you, we should be attracted only by your holy love»⁸.

➤ **In the light of the Magisterium of the Church**

In a world characterized by *«a materialism which craves possessions, heedless of the needs and sufferings of the weakest, and lacking any concern for the balance of natural resources. The reply of the consecrated life is found in the profession of evangelical poverty [...], expressed in an active involvement in the promotion of solidarity and charity»⁹.*

The experience of consecrated poverty cries out to the world to appreciate things in their just measure as St John Paul II said: *«Poverty proclaims that God is man's only real treasure. When poverty is lived according to the example of Christ who, "though he was rich, became poor" (2 Cor 8,9), it becomes an expression of that total gift of self which the three Divine Persons make to one another»¹⁰.*

This also emphasises the relationship between personal poverty and community poverty, the relationship between creating unity and enhancing pluralism, between the use of material goods and showing solidarity to share them with the poor.

As consecrated persons, we are called *«to live a life of poverty and to embrace the cause of the poor. For each Institute, according to its charism, this involves adopting a simple and austere way of life, both as individuals and as a community»¹¹.* Also, *«Consecrated*

⁸ RMA p. 105-106.

⁹ Cf. Jhon Paul II, *Apostolic Exhortation Vita Consecrata*, Rome, 1996, 89.

¹⁰ VC 21.

¹¹ VC 82.

persons, are called to make their own the urgency of *koinonía*. Es la opción de seguir a Cristo pobre la que lleva a optar por los pobres»¹².

It is also part of our poverty to question ourselves regarding «the forms of power derived from technology, the call to seek other ways of understanding the economy and progress, the value proper to each creature, the human meaning of ecology, the need for forthright and honest debate, the serious responsibility of international and local policy, the throwaway culture and the proposal of a new lifestyle»¹³.

Pope Francis has reminded us about our responsibility to look after the “common home” as a way of respecting and using resources which belong to everyone: «today, however, we have to realise that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor»¹⁴.

This is the essence of the vow of poverty: «One does not only give things to the poor, it is necessary to share with them, even better, to restore what belongs to them. Consecrated men and women who have experienced the gratuitous love of the Father, are called to live the spirituality of restitution, to freely return what has been given to them for the service of their sisters and brothers: life, gifts, time, and needed goods. The consecrated person seeks “a true encounter with the poor and provides an opportunity for sharing that becomes a style of life”; that achieving the highest degree of evangelical poverty»¹⁵.

Bearing witness to poverty by consecrated men and women flies in the face of our culture, and reminds everyone that: «the urgency to free oneself from the economy of exclusion and inequity, because this economy kills. In fact, it leads us to consider the human being in himself as a consumer good, which can be used and then thrown away. We have started the culture of the “gap” which even promotes»¹⁶.

Living consecrated poverty leads to total self-fulfilment with freedom of mind and heart. It leads to the prophetic attitude to welcome in what society rejects and excludes.

➤ **Community prayer**

We propose a time for community prayer which each Community can organise according to their circumstances, perhaps by using a time of celebration already planned, and giving it the appropriate spiritual motivation. This week of **Enlightenment** can help us to strengthen the climate of discernment and praise.

II Week: Revision

¹² CIVCSVA, *Economy at the service of the charism and mission*, Rome, 2018, n. 10.

¹³ Francis, *Encíclica Laudate sí*, Rome, 2015, n. 16.

¹⁴ *Laudate sí*, 49.

¹⁵ *Economy*, n. 11.

¹⁶ *Economy*, n. 12.

Methodological Guidance:

1. Present the objective of the second week.
2. Motivate the reflection and evaluation of personal and community life.
3. Prepare to share in common.
4. Set the date for the community meeting.

➤ Revision of personal and community life

In the light of the reflection made, let us review our personal and community life. The following questions may be helpful:

1. What ideas, aspects, enlightenment, desires, filled my heart in last week's reflection?
2. Do I recognise the personal gifts that I have received gratuitously from our Lord? How do I share them with others?
3. To what are we committed today as a community by contemplating a poor God in the poor? How do we care for the earth, the relations, the organization, use of resources, social justice, working in the mission?
4. What contributions can give us more life, and enrich the whole question of poverty in the Constitutions?

Sharing in the community: convene a community meeting to share two or three aspects which will help us to make further progress along this path of revitalisation.

➤ PRAYER**1**

Loving God,
You hear the cries of each one of your children,
Especially those who are poor and who suffer.
We pray that we may also hear
the cries of people in need:
The patient with mental illness pleading for care and inclusion...
The family pleading for food to eat.....
The migrant baby crying for her mother ...
The young people pleading for education ...
The farmer praying for rain to water her harvest...
The victims of trafficking and abuse, pleading for freedom...
All those who are poor and vulnerable, asking for help...
O Lord open our hearts
So that we can hear the cries of the poor as You hear them
and respond to them as Your hands and feet on this earth.
We ask this in Your name.
Amen.

2

*When I was hungry, you gave me to eat;
when I was thirsty you gave me to drink.
Whatsoever you do to the least of my brethren,
you do it to Me.
Come and enter the house of My Father
When I was a stranger, you opened your doors;
when I was naked, you gave me clothes.
When I was tired, you gave me peace;
when I was frightened, you calmed me down.
When I was small, you taught me to read;
when I was lonely, you gave me your love.
When I was in prison, you visited me;
When I was sick you took care of me.
In a strange country, you gave me a home;
when I had no job, you found me one.
When I was wounded, you took care of it;
looking for friendship, you gave me your hand.
Whether I was black, or white or yellow; mocked at or insulted,
you carried my cross.
When I was old, you smiled at me;
when I couldn't find peace, you brought it to me.
You saw me: full of spit and blood;
dirty with sweat, still you said you knew me.
You were on My side when I was being despised.
Lord, may my poverty in following You
become a haven for the poor;
Sow hope among the needy,
poor out joy around me,
commit me to show solidarity to all men and women.
You meet all my needs.
You care for the flowers and the birds
and everything You have created in the universe.
Permit me, in my poverty,
to restore dignity, gentleness, hospitality and hope
to my most vulnerable brothers and sisters.*

(M. Teresa de Calcutta, adapted)

III Week: Contributions

Suggested methodology:

1. Present the work for the 3rd Week.
2. Motivate the reflection and evaluation of personal and community life.
3. Share and take note of the changes that can be sources of motivation for our charism today.

4. Record the situations for changes to each number in the grid.
 5. Forward the summary to the Province the following week.

Consecrated poverty in the Constitutions

Numbers of Constitutions	Inputs
<p>The basis</p> <p>20 We, the Sisters Hospitallers, moved by the Holy Spirit, imitate Jesus Christ who being rich, became poor for our sake in order to enrich us with his poverty.</p> <p>Jesus lived as a poor man to express his complete trust in the Father, his absolute freedom with regard to the goods of this world, his entire availability for all people and the mystery of his self-emptying, for although he was God he took the form of a slave.</p> <p>Like Him, we choose God as the one thing necessary and we affirm and give witness to the absolute primacy of the Kingdom.</p>	
<p>Object of the vow</p> <p>21 In order to imitate Christ, who was poor, we promise by the vow of poverty to depend on our lawful superiors for the disposal and use of material things.</p> <p>If we are faithful to the evangelical meaning of poverty, we cannot be content only with dependence on superiors in the use of goods, but rather we must live as poor people in fact and in spirit.</p> <p>We retain the ownership of our patrimonial goods and the capacity to acquire more. Before first profession we give up the administration of these goods and arrange for their use and usufruct according to Canon Law.</p> <p>Before final profession we make a will, in a form valid in civil law disposing of all our possessions in accordance with Canon Law.</p> <p>Permission from the Major Superior is needed for any change in this, in accord with the Directory. Sisters who have made perpetual vows may renounce ownership of their patrimony, but this will be done only after mature consideration and with permission from the General Superior with the consent of her councillors.</p>	

<p>Anything we may acquire by our own work, or anything given as a member of the Institute or which may come by way of gift, pension, insurance or grant, belong to the Institute, as stated in the Directory, and we cannot retain or dispose of it.</p>	
<p>Personal and community poverty</p> <p>22 We accept personal and community poverty in the spirit of the beatitudes, and we strive to be poor in spirit and in deed thus showing our unbounded trust in the Father, who does not abandon those who trust in Him.</p> <p>Our life-style should be frugal and simple. We should be content with what is necessary, and should even be glad when we lack something.</p> <p>We should avoid luxury and superfluity in everything we have for our personal and community use.</p>	
<p>Work and poverty</p> <p>23 Our work is a means of support, according to the law of our creator.</p> <p>By our work we help the sick and contribute towards the upkeep of our works. We accept the fatigue it causes uniting ourselves to Christ crucified so as to collaborate with the Son of God in the redemption of mankind.</p> <p>Faithful to the spirit of our Founders and the first sisters, we should be responsible, diligent, and self-sacrificing in our work, choosing the hardest and most difficult tasks for ourselves. We should accept willingly at times, the renunciation of leisure and rest demanded by our hospitaller mission.</p>	
<p>Poverty and self-surrender</p> <p>24 Poverty, freely accepted, facilitates our complete self-surrender to the Father and makes us more available to care for our brothers and sisters in our hospitaller mission.</p> <p>Through our poverty we share our material, intellectual and spiritual goods and we give preference to the poorest and most needy.</p>	
<p>Sharing and administration of possessions</p> <p>25 Our possessions are for the life and mission of the Congregation. There must be an equitable sharing of them at local, provincial and general levels.</p> <p>We must also help, within our possibilities, other religious congregations, the work of the Church and</p>	

<p>social needs.</p> <p>We administer our possessions responsibly, not seeking profit and avoiding unnecessary accumulation.</p> <p>By living evangelical poverty in this way, we shall be witnesses of the kingdom, in which everything belongs to all.</p>	
<p>Mary, model of our poverty</p> <p>26 Mary is the first among the lowly and the one of the Lord who confidently awaits and receives salvation from Him. She lived in real poverty and was for ever available to those in need.</p> <p>She helps us to live our poverty in openness to God in a simple, self-sacrificing life accepting the sacrifice inherent in our Hospitaller mission.</p>	

IV Week: Celebration

Methodology:

1. *It is very important to celebrate the steps of the way we have walked.*
2. *Prepare a celebration of prayer and another festive celebration.*
3. *We end up giving the 6 fact sheet.*